The wind and the rain ward away any chance for sleep. I'm not tired to begin with, but when the lightning strikes so often it makes slumber nearly impossible. The cold manages to inch its way up my chest and spike the bristles on the back of my neck. It plays with my bare flesh, knowing that I can't keep it away. I could still bang wet rocks or rub wet sticks together in some faint hope that I could bring fire, heat, and life to us, but the longer that this facade goes on the more and more I realize that I can't do much of anything right.

In the lightning flash I see the wall of ice that has grown between Cassie and me. If I felt like a disgusting pile of filth by taking her away from a monster, then I feel like a worthless wriggling worm for becoming the monster myself. My intentions were true, but none of that really matters does it? The way that she sees me now is the only thing that really matters to me, and I don't need any hints to know the monster she saw me as; still sees me as.

Cassie isn't talking. I'm not talking. What words would be daring enough to fill the air and risk burning any bridges, closing off every door? No words are even brave enough to peek around the bend and consider being said. My mind is blank. The noise is empty from all but the pitter-patter of the pouring rain and the crash of thunder. And a whimper or two, from who I'm not certain.

"I... forgive you," Cassie says. Even in the darkness I see her silhouette turn towards me. "For real."

"Thank you," I manage to respond.

Faster and faster emotions seem to swirl around the cave. A yellowed hue of happiness, followed by a purple shot of relief hails its way to a bluish stream of worry. I can't really know if she means what she says, or if she just believes that it's the right thing to do. Either way I can't come to forgive myself until I know. The words within are given a bit more courage, but still don't have the valor to burst forth. They wait for something else to happen; for their opponent to make another move.

"Are you okay?" Cassie asks me.

"Wish I could tell you."

"Mr—Andrew, it's not your fault. You couldn't have known..."

Cassie, I know it wasn't my fault. The car blowing up wasn't my fault. That doesn't change facts. I still have to deal with the horrors that they've caused. I still have to deal with the consequences. No, these things aren't necessarily my fault, but they're still my problems. I have to deal with them.

"Thank you Cassie..." are the only words that come to the forefront.

I try to wrap my mind around other things, but I can't help but realize how screwed we are. We're wet, cold, and have no food. This is only our second night away from civilization and it's a miracle that we've made it this far. My mind gnaws on that thought as exhaustion finally catches up to me.

I'm able to sleep, finally. For the first time in two days I'm able to sleep. The relief keeps growing, doesn't it? It stops when I awake. The rolling thunder and the drizzle outside forced me so. It's lighter than it was last night so I know that morning has graced the world, but to make sure I consult my watch only to find out that the battery has died. Great.

Cassie is still sleeping. I don't plan on going anywhere in this dreck until I am caught by a burning sensation in my throat. I guess that the rain can be useful for something, other than nearly getting us plunged to our deaths. I drink the pain away and just breath in the misty morning air. There's an unsettling chill in the ether and I now realize how much it made my head hurt.

I'm sick. I've got the pounding head, the burning throat, and the shit ton of snot. Looks like we wouldn't be going anywhere today even if it wasn't raining. Our greatest adversary for this day is going to be boredom, a much lighter fight in the ongoing war, but a fight all the same. I have a couple of twigs drying in the shelter of the cave, so I need to occupy myself while nature takes its course.

I stand out in the rain, not really sure why. I shadow my uncertainty by looking for anything: food, wood, fallen debris. I see much of the latter two, but unfortunately none of the former one. I finally see that this cave is at the base of a mountain. From so close I can't see the top, but its rolling hills break into straight-drop cliffs every now and then. I realize that I need to come up with a plan. We cannot keep wandering around the forest forever, and I'm not going to get much more opportunity to do any long term planning. I decide that it's best to actually head for civilization. Even if I get caught Cassie will still be relatively safe. After last night's incident I don't need any reminders of her mortality. That bides the question of how I can possible return to civilization.

We can return to the river, but from how fast it was flowing I'd have to imagine that we were on the outskirts of some wild rapids. The chance of falling in would be much too great, especially with the wet stones that wall the waters in. The other option would be to wander around randomly... unless we got to the top of the mountain. From the mountain's peak, we could see for miles around. It's the faintest glimmer of hope, but it's the best possible option that I can fathom.

My stomach crashes my train of thought. We're doing this again, huh? There's no food anywhere in sight. The only thing possible source of food that crosses my mind is the river that nearly killed us. I'm actually bored enough to consider fishing. This has become an interesting adventure.

I pull a stick off of a tree and sharpen the splintered end on the cave walls. I touch the pointed tip and a trickle of blood slides down my finger. Excellent. I follow our muddied tracks back down to the river. It's overflowing with torrents of white water. If any fish is trying to struggle through here it'd be smashed to pieces on the rocks within. It doesn't stop me from randomly stabbing the surface. A roar does though.

I look up to where it came from to see a bear standing on a ledge, just above the bristled canopy. It snarls at me. Even from this distance I see slobber dropping to the ground below. The wind brushes its fur too and fro, and all of this racks my body with fear. The makeshift spear falls to the floor and rolls into the water.

I begin to move when I realize that the bear isn't. It looks like it's trying to find a

safe way down to gore me, but it isn't able to. I don't really know if its a good thing or a bad thing, but as soon as I get my wits I find my way to the cave with as much speed as I can muster. Cassie is awake, and has her legs folded in her arms.

"Where were you?" she half-pleads; half-demands.

"I was... um... I was. Never mind. We can't go anywhere today on count of the rain."

"What do you mean 'we?' I can leave anytime I want, especially because you were willing to leave me behind just like that."

"Um... what?"

"I thought you left me," Cassie says as she gets up and hugs me, her eyes strewn with tears.

"Cassie, are... you okay?"

"Oh, so now it's me with the problem!?" she says, letting me go. She begins belting me with her fists in anger. "It's you who thought about leaving me here!"

"Cassie, why would I leave you here? I was out trying to get some food, and before you ask no I didn't find any. Now do you want to tell me what this is all about?"

Cassie doesn't say a word. She keeps punching. They don't hurt me, physically at least, so I let her keep doing it in hopes she'll tire herself out. There isn't much other ways she could burn energy today so at least some good will come of this. Still once the initial surprise dies down curiosity takes its place. I'd like to know what I actually did before I can decide whether or not I should feel guilty about this one. Did she really think that I wouldn't come back? God, that's it, isn't it?

"Cassie, listen to me very carefully. I'm not going to leave you, no matter what happens. I'll be with you until I can get you to safety."

"Do you promise?

"I promise."